

UNIVERSITY „LUCIAN BLAGA” - SIBIU

FACULTY OF ORTHODOX THEOLOGY

THE POLITICAL THEOLOGY DURING THE CONSTANTINE DYNASTY

Criteria concerning the Church-State relationship

for a pluralist society

COORDINATION:

REV. Ph. D. PROF: NICOLAE CHIFĂR

CANDIDATE:

PR. OVIDIU PANAITE

2009

THE POLITICAL THEOLOGY DURING THE CONSTANTINE DYNASTY

Criteria concerning the Church-State relationship

for a pluralist society

Conceptual clarification and *status questionis*.

The present Ph.D. thesis, elaborated under the coordination of Father Professor Nicolae Chifăr attempts to identify a historical and dogmatical attitude of the Church in its relationships with the world. The interest towards this theme arose in 2000. At that time, soon after the ordainment, I had to present an essay entitled: *The Orthodox clergy and the political and moral responsibility of the laymen in the society*. In the bibliographical list I made on this occasion, besides the papers and the specialty works of the Romanian authors, there was an excerpt from a German work that I had found in an Italian version.¹ This is the first time when I met the concept of *political theology*. The author used the syntagm of *political theology* subordinated, theoretically speaking, to *the liberation theology*. Later on, the theologian Luigi Sartori was about to make a few specifications regarding the broader meanings of the concept. This the way I began a vast research which often proved to be discouraging due to the diversity of the issues involved. Erik Peterson, Karl Rahner, Francis Dvornik, Michael Azkoul, Kartasheff used to impress others due to the rigorous research and the synthesis capacity. In such a context, *the political theology* concept acquired new significations. Being helped by the competent coordination of the Father Professor Nicolae Chifăr and encouraged by the guidelines proposed by other remarkable professors in the field of the historical theology (Ioan Vasile Leb, *Biserică și implicare*, Limes Publ. House, Cluj, 2000; Idem, *Biserica în acțiune*, Limes Publ. House, Cluj, 2001; Adrian Gabor, *Biserică și Stat în timpul lui Teodosie cel Mare*, Edit. Bizantină. București, s.a; Costion Nicolescu, *Teologul în cetate, Părintele Stăniloae în aria politicii*, Christiana Publ. House, București, 2003; *Gândirea socială a Bisericii*, volume realized and presented by Ioan I.

¹ Johann Baptist Metz, *Dibattito sulla teologia politica*, Morcelliana Publ. House, Brescia, 1968.

Ică jr. and Germano Marani, Deisis, Sibiu, 2000 etc.) I attempted to formulate an Orthodox political theology. From my point of view, it is extremely necessary to update such an Orthodox political and theological system, as nowadays one increasingly stresses the connections between the Church and the world.

It is necessary to formulate this historical and dogmatic attitude of the Church due to the challenges of the contemporary world: the secularization, the globalization, the pressure caused by the economic and politic crisis, the rise of the unemployment rate, the exacerbation of violence etc. in this context, the secular trend brings the relativity of values as an expression of dechristianization, the conceiving of a different form of sacred, where *the Church in involvement* imposes itself.

The secularization is the trend according to which the social and individual values exist by themselves, considered to be autonomous facing the metaphysical area of the religious thought. The secular civilization is interested in the human realities as far as their concrete functionality is concerned and it is not interested in the ontology of things, it approaches the theme of the world and the man from the perspective of a strictly technical thought, it asserts the structural autonomy of science in connection with God, one creating the premises of a methodological atheism.

I believe that such an attitude that acts like a guideline in the secularization trend is precisely the *Political Theology*.

In the context of this secularization process there appears *the necessity of a theological and methodological system*. It is of major importance to become acquainted with the secular realities and the intuition of values or no values; the individualization, the analysis and their reference to the biblical message. In this situation, a great part is played by the patristic experience. The reference of the situation to the spiritual heritage of the Church (The Holy Scripture and the Holy Tradition) will guide the theologian towards a viable solution.

By the syntagm of *political theology* one understands the reference of the Christian conscience to the political and imperial manifest of the authority and to the adjacent realities that follow or greatly depend on the reference to this imperial authority or state authority in a modern sense.

The subjects discussed are grouped around the theological fundamentals of the Christian conception concerning the emperor's person, his political and religious

practice but also concerning the political philosophy of the Empire referring to Christianity, in general, and to Church, in particular (the emperor was seen as *mimesis*, the attributes of a Christian emperor, the personal relationship with God; the emperor and the Church; the connections with the heretics, the Judaism and the paganism; the empire and Christianity).

These works define *the political theology* by using the specific method and its formal principle as *politics* in a broad sense², or as the religious and theological perspective of politics and the political perspective of religion³. Another panel of researchers defines *political theology*, considering its purpose and evaluating it as being the theological justification of a political system.⁴ The researchers grouped around Andreas Marxen believe that Christianity has no political theology, because the term that best defines the attitude towards the problems of the *polis* is the *metapolitics* term. The latter attitude raised a few sociological problems as part of Christianity, because one risks the transfer of the elements which define the allegiance and the involvement of the Christian in society on a metaphysical level, irrelevant for the concrete responsibilities.⁵

In a broad sense, by *political theology* one may understand the critical relation between society and faith, which is seen as a social dimension of the religious act or as an application of the Christian message in all aspects of the human life. In a certain sense, by *political theology* one may understand the reference of the Christian conscience to the political manifesto of the authority, a theology determined by the political philosophy of a system in charge.

Another differentiation that should be made in order to understand the meanings of *political theology* is the separation between *the old political theology* and *the new political theology*. Chronologically, the term of *old political theology* refers to the research developed until the first half of the 20th century, in the context of the specific themes. The term of *old* doesn't imply devaluation or an ignorance equivalent to a social and religious lack of importance of the political theology, but only the separation from the new meaning of the syntagm after 1960. After the first

² Karl Schmitt, *Politische Theologie*, Leipzig, 1934, rom.trans. *Teologia politică*, translation and notes by Lavinia Stan and Lucian Turcescu, Universal Dalsi Publ. House, București, 1996.

³ Hans Eger, *Die ersten Ansätze zu einer politischen Theologie in der christlichen Kirche*, in „Deutsche Theologie. Monatschrift für die deutsche evangelische Kirche”, nr. 2, Stuttgart, 1935, pp. 272-281; Idem, *Kaiser und Kirche in der Geschichtstheologie Eusebs von Cäsarea*, in „Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche”, nr. 38, Berlin, 1939, pp. 97-115.

⁴ Erik Peterson, *Kaiser Augustus im Urteil des antiken Christentums. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der politischen Theologie*, Kempten-München, 1933, pp. 289-299.

⁵ Andreas Marxen, *Das Problem der Analogie zwischen den Seinsstrukturen der grossen Gemeinschaften*, dargestellt im engeren Anschluss an die Schriften von Karl Schmitt und Erik Peterson, Würzburg, 1938.

half of the 20th century when the trends of the liberation theology developed, the school of Karl Rahner, by its follower Johann Baptist Metz, initiated a concept called the new political theology.⁶

The term of *political* appealed to the emotions of the contemporary conscience, the reason why it became the object of numerous debates. This direction is different from the *classical political theology*; it is not considered to be a science in the theology field that studies politics, neither a way of professional therapy for those categories of researchers that want to create a new conscience which is troubled by the corruption of the political act as such. As a reaction to Enlightenment, *the new political theology* will have a program centered on the idea of a public manifesto of the religious act. Actually it is the separation from an individualist area of some religious experiences for the benefit of its public and social side. Political theology appears as a critical relation between society and faith, admitting Church in its dimension of public witness of the freedom offered by faith.⁷

In the Romanian background the issue began to be approached from different points of view. Theologians, philosophers, historians and sociologists tried together to understand, to classify and to apply the real possibilities that follow this analysis.⁸ The necessity of this kind of debates was identified in the reality that Europe can no longer rely on the economical factor as a sole transnational element or as a unity factor. From this point of view the interest for this issue is justified. The concerns of the Romanian researchers are shaped as the original form of a synthesis between the two types of *political theology*. The Romanian originality consists of both the approaching of the issue from the point of view of *the classical political theology*,

⁶ Johann Baptist Metz, *op. cit.*; Idem, *I rapporti tra la chiesa e il mondo alla luce di una teologia politica*, in „Teologia del rinnovamento”, Asisi, 1969, pp. 267-282; Jürgen Moltmann, *Religione, rivoluzione e futuro*, Brescia, 1971; D. Sölle, *Teologia politica*, Brescia, 1972; C. Geffré, *La dimensione politica della speranza cristiana*, Assisi, 1973.

⁷ Kuno Füssel, *Teologia politica*, în *Die Heissen Eisen von A bis Z*, Johannes Bauer, Verlag, Graz, Austria, it.transl. *Dizionario Teologico*, Cittadela Editrice, Rome, 1974, pp. 736-743.

⁸ Liviu Stan, *Relațiile dintre Biserică și Stat-studiu istorico-juridic*, in „Ortodoxia”, an IV, 1952, nr. 3-4, iulie-decembrie, pp. 353-461; Ioan Vasile Leb, *Biserică și implicare*, Limes Publ. House, Cluj, 2000; Idem, *Biserica în acțiune*, Limes Publ. House, Cluj, 2001; *Teologie și politică de la Sfinții Părinți la Europa Unită*, vol. coord. de Miruna Tătaru Căzaban, Anastasia, București, 2004; Adrian Gabor, *Biserică și Stat în timpul lui Teodosie cel Mare*, Bizantină Publ. House, București, s.a; Idem, *Biserica și Statul în primele patru secole*, Sofia Publ. House, București, 2003; Costion Nicolescu, *Teologul în cetate, Părintele Stăniloae în aria politicii*, Christiana Publ. House, București, 2003; *Un suflet pentru Europa. Dimensiunea religioasă a unui proiect politic*, volume coordinated by Radu Carp, Anastasia Publ. House, București, 2005; *Gândirea socială a Bisericii*, volume realized and presented by Ioan I. Ică jr. and Germano Marani, Deisis, Sibiu, 2000; Teodor Baconsky, *Puterea schismei*, Anastasia, București, 2001; H.-R. Patapievi, *Omni recent*, second edition, Humanitas, București, 2001; Dan Ciachir, *Ofensiva Ortodoxă*, Anastasia, București, 2002; Radu Preda, *Biserica în Stat, o invitație la dezbatere*, Scripta, Cluj, 1999; *Biserică-Stat-Societate- documentația conferinței Academiei Evanghelice Transilvania (AET) în colaborare cu AIDRom*, seria Academia, vol. 1, Sibiu, 2003.

and the elaboration of a critical project concerning the connection between the civil conscience of humankind and the Christian conscience.⁹ The concerns follow mainly two directions. The first one consists in the enumeration and the critical display of the main economical, financial and work policy problems in Europe, directly influencing the responsibilities that belong to the European religions and confessions, and the second consists in the identification of some spiritual models for a European religious portrait. The concept of *political theology* wasn't approached *in extensor* neither by the Western theology, nor by the Eastern one, though it is a major concept for both civilizations. The first work that impresses due to its maturity in the understanding of the political, religious and cultural dimensions of the Byzantine political theology is the work of Erik Peterson entitled *Der Monotheismus als politisches Problem: Beitrag zur Geschichte der politischen Theologie im Imperium Romanum*, published in Leipzig, in 1935.¹⁰ Other contributions of the researchers will appear six years later in the studies of Keneth M. Setton¹¹, completed in 1947 by Hendrikus Berkhof¹² and in 1966 by Francis Dvornik¹³.

The same problems became the object of interest for other researchers, whose conclusions were published in the specialty magazines. The central idea of the studies, though not unanimously approved, was that the Constantine period, *renovatio constantini* represents the extension of a monarchical typology of Hellenic origin, a typology built on the parallelism between monarchy and monotheism. Eusebius of Caesarea brought his great contribution to the Christianization of the Hellenist concepts, and later on the Greek fathers expanded their interpretations to the far-reaching conceptual areas.

The researcher Michael Azkoul partly agrees with the previous affirmations. The sanction brought by Azkoul is the following: the method of a panel of modern researchers, a restrictive one and a positivist one, doesn't approach the

⁹ Father professor stressed the need of seriously approach all the components of the church life, including the relation with the civil power: *the Church considers the life of the believers in its life, the same way it takes the image of the earth and the period it lives in. This is the image it doesn't ignore and it doesn't try to get rid of it, because it represents the support, the basis of its spiritual image and its finalgoal salvation-for which it works by grace, it iis not a goal that concerns only the spiritual image, but also the material one, in the q.a., p. 353.*

¹⁰ Peterson makes a connection between the politival involvement, following the parallelism between paganism and Christian monotheism. He makes a positive evaluation of the Empire in biblical terms, Logos, Messia etc, following the concepts before the meeting of the first Ecumenical Synod, that later will become the basis for the politology of the 4th century.

¹¹ Kenneth Setton, *The christian attitude towards the Emperor in the fourth century, especially as shown in adresses to the Emperor*, trad. deutsch *Kirche und Kaiser: Eine Untersuchung der Entstehung der byzantinischen und theokratischen Staatsauffassung im vierten Jahrhundert*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1941.

¹² Hendrikus Berkhof, *Kirche und Kaiser. Eine Untersuchung der Entstehung der byzantinischen und der theokratischen Staatsauffassung im vierten Jahrhundert*, Zürich, 1947.

¹³ *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy*, Washinton, D.C., 1966.

Christological context of the Patristical political theology. According to him, the Christological concept is defining in the establishment of the theoretical fundamentals of the Church, which becomes a starting point for its reference to the civil conscience. The sanction brought by Azkoul to a historical line is that one ignores the epistemological and metaphysical evaluation of dogmas. This very *docta ignorantia* created the premises of a hermeneutics that gave birth to the idea that *renovatio constantini* is the continuation of a theocratic Hellenism. The return to the Hellenist pagan concepts and the evaluation of the new Constantine Christian monarchy according to this type of lecture gives birth to a confusion state that cancels the newness of Christianity in the benefit of its interpretation as a mixture of philosophical ideas, with a specific ethics, a system that syncretically absorbed local faith and practices, shortly Christianity would be at this level the historical result of more faiths, a historical mimesis.

In fact, the Greek Fathers didn't develop a *stricto senso* political philosophy, but they converted the Judaic theocracy into a Christian concept.¹⁴ Starting from these premises, A.V. Kartasheff, professor at the Saint Serge Orthodox Theological Institute from Paris, considers that the possibility of understanding the Byzantine Christocratical system resides in the understanding of the sacrament of Christ's Embodiment, more precisely, the acceptance of the Christological formula of Chalcedon: *One and the Same Christ, Son, God, without beginning, known as two natures not intermingled, unchanged, undivided and undistributed the separation of natures not affecting the union.*¹⁵ This dogmatic formulation was about to constitute the basis of the Byzantine *symphony* during Justinian period, a political extract from a dogmatic concept, a norm with a very clear political component.

It is useful to notice from a historical point of view how many contemporary practices and patterns return to that crucial period of initial recognition of the Church by the state during Emperor Constantine reign. All these realities happened because in that period Christianity was admitted not only at the level of a civilizing element (Christianity is not only a vector of social ethics or an indicator of the historical progress) but also at the level of a revealed religion (Christianity is rounded off when remains loyal to its essence, namely discovering God), the space that manifest the true God. In such a context (the primary fundamentals of the Christian

¹⁴ George Florovsky, *Empire and the Desert: Antinomies of Christian History*, in „Greek Orthodox Theological Review”, nr. 3, 1957.

¹⁵ Actio 5 (J.D. Mansi, Ed., *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* 7, Venetia, 1759), 116 f., apud Michael Azkoul, *Sacerdotium et Imperium: the Constantinian Renovatio according to the Greek Fathers*, in „Theological Studies”, 32, 1971, p. 432.

political philosophy determined by the dogmatic and martyrial conscience) we have the possibility of suggesting some criteria specific to the political theology elaborated during Constantine dynasty:

1. The political theology of the Constantine époque reconfigures the geometry of history: the cyclical, physiological history becomes rectilinear history (the Constantine period offers a history read from the perspective of Resurrection).
2. The characteristics of the political theology in the Constantine period: Christocentric; churchly; based on Holy Scripture and Holy Tradition which was formulated at that time; spiritual; personalist, realist.
3. As problems, it remains to identify an Arian sub trend at the level of the connection between the Church authority and imperial authority (State, in a modern sense), as an expression of the conformity between the Arian monotheism and the idea of a Nicene rationalist monarchy (the experience of the Church in the Constantine period eliminates the risk of a political Arianism). The Arianism created the premises for a state-controlled Church, taken out of the biblical and patristic tradition.
4. The political theology of the Constantine époque offers the interpretation key for the compared political theology: the Christian political theology as against the Persian Mideans or, later on, the Islam.
5. The political theology of the Constantine époque supports the necessity of a Christian ethics of the political act: the need of supporting an ethics of politics,¹⁶ which was remarked not only by the theologians circles, but also by the philosophical environment, especially by the Italian center of Gallarate, that is the transformation of the political institutions and of the power sources.
6. The political theology of the Constantine époque establishes a background facing the religious syncretism, the combinative principles that found new federations based on faith.
7. The Church is defined as a divine and human organism, with its own nature and essence, the image of the unseen world. From this perspective the model of the Constantine Church intervenes as a regulator factor in those backgrounds where the Church exclusively transformed itself in an institution or became a mere state department.

¹⁶ ***, *Religione e Politica*, CEDAM, Padova, 1978, 439 pp.; ***, *Etica e Politica, la prassi e i valori*, Contributi al XXXIII Convegno dei Ricercatori di filosofia Padova, 12-14 settembre 1988, Gregoriana, Padova, 1990.

8. The conversion of Constantine was the equivalent of a revolution,¹⁷ the edict of 313 representing a double fundament of the imperial politics: the freedom of conscience for the citizens (against totalitarianism) and the religious neutrality of the Empire.
9. Some researchers claimed that, on the basis of a protectorate of the state, the Church got an apathetic and integrative state that would rather be specific mainly to the Constantine époque, being denied the specific dynamism, but this idea opposes itself to the political theology of the first centuries, which, on the contrary, reveals an active theology formulated around the dogmatical and martyrical conscience of the Church.
10. In the contemporary world, it is necessary to formulate a critical connection between the civil conscience and the Christian one, thus eliminating the danger of a methodological atheism.
11. Constantine period offers a role model against the anarchic liberalism, even if Christianity brought the promotion of the unity and equality principles.¹⁸
12. Tolerance that had in mind the globalization of faiths.
13. The identification of the connection between the nation and the universalism of the Christian faith in the first half of the 4th century, as well as between the European universalism and the Constantine imperial universalism.
14. The identification of the elements that attest the political function of religion, in general and of the Christianity, in particular (see the political party with a Christian program)
15. The modifications in the Church art by the integration of the new Christian imperial ideas.
16. The political theology of the Constantine époque contains applications based on the alterative principles, *consuetudinis vestrae celebrate solemnia*. The establishment is the fundamental principle for the efficiency of the ecumenical dialogue and interreligious dialogue.
17. The 4th century inherits the conflict of ontologies, which it broadens by the integration of the Christian spirit, perceived by the Empire as a political utilitarian element. From this point of view, it is interesting to study the beginning of the secularization of the religious terms that later gave birth to the political lexis.¹⁹

¹⁷ Jean Jacques Chevallier, *q. w.*, p. 234.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 249.

¹⁹ It is the observation of the German politologist Karl Schmitt.

18. The 4th century causes changes at the level of the collective mentality, correcting the evaluation of the Church as a ghetto space.

On the basis of the formulations extracted from the synthetic analysis of the first half of the 4th century, we suggest a few principles at a theological and political level. The two terms of the comparison are, on one hand, the Christian conscience manifested at an ecclesial level, and, on the other hand, the civil conscience, understood as a manifesto of the state: Mutual recognition; Identity of terms; Specific competences;²⁰ Concentrical dynamism (one enlarges the other); Common purpose – human well-being; Means of specific action; Constant collaborations for the harmonizing and the temporization of the connections; Knowledge and transparency; Loyalty.

The risks appear when the following principles are not respected:

- the confiscation of the identities
- the politizing of the religious act
- the clericalization of politics
- the twofolded utilitarianism (clientelism – the introduction by means of political pressure of a churchly structure far from its purposes and vocation)
- the ideological separation and the refuse of the mutual help
- the selective consultation

The Constantine period underlines the missionary ethos of the Church which is valued in two directions: *ad intra*, referring to the organization of the internal life of the Church at all levels and *ad extra*, with a direct reference to the fields of human life outside the Church. This latter dimension is the concrete testimony of the spiritual nature of the Church, ad an organism with a universal vocation, surpassing the human limitations, and manifesting its apostolic character by this type of misionarism and also by the loyalty towards the Tradition.

²⁰ Jean Jacques Chevallier, *q. w.*, p. 236.